

# Teso language

**Teso** (natively *Ateso*) is an Eastern Nilotic language spoken by the Iteso people of Uganda and Kenya. It is part of the Teso–Turkana language cluster.<sup>[3]</sup><sup>[4]</sup>

According to the 2002 Uganda population and housing census, over 1.57 million people in Uganda (6.7 percent of the total Uganda population)<sup>[5]</sup> spoke Ateso. Also, an estimated 279,000 people in Kenya speak the language. Its SIL code is TEO.<sup>[4]</sup>

Ateso is spoken in the Teso sub-region.<sup>[3]</sup>

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	Ateso
	Ateso
Native to	Kenya, Uganda
Region	Northwest Kenya, west of Lake Turkana,Eastern Uganda
Native speakers	1.9 million (2002 & 2009 censuses) <sup>[1]</sup>
Language family	Nilo-Saharan? <div> <div>▪<span> </span>Eastern Sudanic</div> <div>▪<span> </span>Nilotic</div> <div>▪<span> </span>Eastern Nilotic</div> <div>▪<span> </span>Ateker-Lotuko–Maa</div> <div>▪<span> </span>Ateker</div> <div>▪<span> </span><b>Ateso</b></div> </div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	teo
Glottolog	teso1249 ( <span>http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/id/teso1249</span> ) <sup>[2]</sup>

## Alphabet

(i) There are 22 letters in the Ateso alphabet<sup>[6]</sup> **F,H,Q,V,H,X** and **Z** are not used and **ŋ** and **NY** are added. **F,H,Q,V,H,X,Z** only appear in loan words. The pronunciation guides that follow are for practice only; the correct sounds can only be learned by practice from a teacher or an audio media.

(ii) There are five vowels in Ateso

**A, E, I, O, U.**

These five letters, however, represent more than five sounds, for the letters **E, I, O** and **U** have two values each; a "close" value and an "open" value.

Close vowels are pronounced approximately as follows:

**E** as in beg (French é): **aipet**----- to kick

**I** as in seat: **aidip**----- to hit

**O** as in Scottish pronunciation of bone (French eau): **aimor**----- to insult, to abuse

**U** as in fool: **aikut**----- to scratch the earth, to scoop something

Open vowels are pronounced approximately as follows:

**E** as in beg (French è): **aipet** ----- to lay out

**I** as in sit: **ailid**----- to fasten

**O** as in gone (or in glory when long): **aimor**----- to share

**U** as in full: **aikut** -----to blow

**A** is pronounced as in art (never short as in ram)

*abal* 'to say'

Note that whether the root vowel is "closed" or "open" affects the conjugation of the verb.<sup>[7]</sup>

(iii) Where the vowels **AI** or **OI** stand together, they represent sounds approximating the "i" in bite and "oy" in annoy respectively. In other vowel combinations, both vowels must be given their full values. The "au" in **kau** -----(*behind*) is pronounced "kah-oo" not "kow".

(iv) All words ending in a consonant possess a semi-mute or "shadow" vowel<sup>[8]</sup> after the final consonant, which is not pronounced when the word stands in isolation, but which is pronounced when the word is followed by another word beginning with a consonant:

e.g. The Ateso translation of "the women go to the house" is written:

**elosete anor togo** ----- *the women are going to the house*

but is pronounced: **elosete anoro Togo**

If the word following is normally written as one with the preceding word, the "shadow" vowel is not only pronounced but written:

e.g. **elosete anoroke togo** ----- **his women are going to the house**

Other examples are given in (vii) below.

(v) There are sixteen consonants and one semi-vowel in Ateso, pronounced approximately as follows:

**B** as in bat: **bobo** -----*again*

**C** as in chat (never as in cat): **elacet** ----- *key*

**D** as in dog: edou ----- **rain**

**G** as in get (never as in geology): *agasia* rubbish/trash

**J** as in jam: *aijar* life

**K** as in king: *ekek* door  
**L** as in let: *alalau* width  
**M** as in mat: **mam** ----- *no*  
**N** as in nut: **ainu** ----- *to hug*  
**ŋ**<sup>\*\*</sup> as in hanger (never as in finger): **injai** ----- *who*  
**NY** as in Spanish *Señorita*: **anya** ----- *grass* (plural)  
**P** as in put: **papa** ----- *father*  
**R** as in rat (should be well rolled): **erute** ----- *gate*  
**S** as in service : **aisab** ----- *to tell lies*  
**T** as in toss: **toto** ----- *mother*  
**y** as in yellow: **yoga** ----- *hello*

#### Semi vowel:

**W** as in win: **awasia** ----- the end, **aiwosa** ----- *to prosecute*

(vi) In words of foreign origin introduced into Teso the missing sound **F** is replaced by **P** and the missing sound **V** by **B** or **P**. **Z** is replaced by **S**.

Thus *mesa* -----*table* (Kiswahili) becomes **e-mesa**

*oku-fuga* -----*to rule* (Luganda) becomes **ai-puga**

(vii) It is an invariable rule that two consonants can never stand together in the same word. Both in speech and in writing. When word construction brings two consonants together, either one of the consonants must be dropped or the "shadow" vowel mentioned in sub-paragraph (iv) above must be inserted between the consonants.

E.g. (Omission of one consonant)

*Nen-pe-nen* 'just there' is written and pronounced *nepenen*.

(Insertion of "shadow" vowel)

*ŋon-tuŋa-nan* 'every man' is written and pronounced: *ŋonituŋanan*

*Elacet-kon* 'your key' is written and pronounced *elacetekon*

<sup>\*\*</sup>Due to the introduction of typesetting & word processing machines, *ŋ* is now almost entirely written *NG*. It is only in old literature that *ŋ* still appears. The fact that in some works the two letters *NG* are found together in place of *ŋ* is no exception to the above rules. These two letters are merely an alternative representation of the sound *ŋ*, in the same way as the letters *NY* represent one sound. The semi-vowel *W*, however, can and frequently does follow a consonant:

*aswam* work  
*ekwam* air

## Pronunciation

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The correct pronunciation of these letters when formed into words can only be learned by practice. As a general rule, all syllables should be given equal stress, though the stem or root syllable often carries slightly more stress than other syllables. Stress does not, however, affect the length of the vowel stressed or its pitch or tone. It is equally important to note that syllable pitch plays a vital part in correct pronunciation and that many words, which are spelled identically, have a different meanings according to syllable pitch.

For example:

\_\_\_ ↗ \_\_\_ **é lí pì** ----- *I am praying*  
\_\_\_ \_\_\_ ∪ **elipĩ** ----- *I was praying*  
\_\_\_ \_\_\_ ↗ **elipí** ----- *he/she was praying*

## Orthography

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(i) The spelling used in most of the first published Ateso books is in accordance with the official orthography agreed upon by the Ateso Orthography Committee in 1947.<sup>[9]</sup> It was then accepted as a general principle that all words should be written in full even though normally contracted in speech. It should be particularly noted that a short -a or -e at the end of a word is dropped in speech when the word is followed by a word beginning with a vowel.

e.g. **ekitabo loka etelepat** ----- *the book of the boy*  
is pronounced **ekitabo lok' etelepat**.

(ii) Recently, it is evident that the spoken language is continuing to move away from the written language especially in most parts of Uganda. This means that some aspects of orthography may well need revision soon.

(iii) While the Iteso of Tororo district in Uganda and Teso district in Kenya retain the letter k in the spoken language, the Iteso in most other areas of Uganda tend to omit it in most of the words.<sup>[10]</sup>

E.g.

Ateso in Teso, Kenya & Tororo, Uganda	Ateso in Amuria district, Uganda	English meaning
Akilip lok'asuban	ailip loasuban	to pray to the creator
akinyam emkati/atap	ainyam atap	to eat bread
akimat akile	aimat akile	to drink milk
akitabu lokalaunan	eitabo loalaunan	a holy book
Akote inyamat/inyamen	aimo ainyamat	to look for food

## Basic lexicon

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Hello – *yoga*

How are you? – *Ijai biai* (singular), *Ijaasi biai* (plural)

Fine, and you? – *Ejokuna, arai ijo?*

Fine – *ejokuna*

What is your name? – *Ingai bo ekon'kiror?*

My name is ... – *Eka'kiror* ...

Name --- **Ekiror**

Nice to see you. --- **Eyalama ewanyun** (*also: Eyalama aanyun*)

See you again --- **Awanyunos bobo**

Book – **Eitabo**

Because – **Naarai**

The first sentence in the bible can be translated as **Ageunet, abu Edeke Kosub akwap keda akuj** ("In the beginning God made the earth and the heavens" lit. "the down and the up").

# Gender and noun prefix

As with many other languages, Ateso words have grammatical gender. For grammatical purposes all nouns in Ateso are divided into three classes or genders:(a) masculine, (b) feminine and (c) neuter.

## Noun prefix

Every noun in Ateso has a prefix which varies according to the gender of the noun or according to whether the noun is singular or plural. Nouns (in the singular) starting with "E" or "O" are usually masculine. Those starting with "A" are feminine while those that start with "I" are neuter. See table below for details.

	masculine	feminine	neuter
singular	e,o	a	i
plural	i,o	a	i
e.g.	<b>etelepat</b> → <b>itelepai</b> (boy → boys)	<b>apese</b> → <b>apesur</b> (girl → girls)	<b>ikoku</b> → <b>idwe</b> (child → children)

The only exception to the above rule are certain nouns denoting relationships and directions.

e.g. **toto** ----- mother; **papa** ----- father; **mamai** ----- uncle; **inac** ----- sister ; **ija** ----- aunt

**kide** ----- east; **too** ----- west; **ɲalakimak (or agolitomei)** ----- south; **nyakoi** ----- north

It should, however, be noted that the noun prefix is always dropped when the noun comes after the following pronouns or adjectives and their feminine, neuter or plural forms:

pronoun or adjective	examples
<b>ece, ace, ice</b> – other, another;	<b>ecetunganan</b> – another man; <b>aceberu</b> – another woman;
<b>ngol</b> (m) or <b>ngin</b> (f,n) – every	<b>icetunganan</b> -another person; <b>icetunga</b> -other people <b>etunganan</b> – a man; <b>ngolitunganan (or nginitunganan)</b> -every man;
<b>edio</b> (m), <b>adio</b> (f), <b>idio</b> (n) – any, some	<b>aberu</b> – a woman; <b>nginiberu</b> – every woman <b>ediotunganan</b> -any man; <b>adiopese</b> -any girl; <b>idiokoku</b> – any child
<b>ediope</b> (m), <b>adiope</b> (f) – one	<b>adiopeberu</b> – one woman; <b>ediope kiliokit bon</b> -only one man

The following is a general classification of most nouns.

## Masculine nouns

The masculine nouns are:

(i) Names of male beings:

e.g. **ekingok** – dog

**ekoroi** ----- he-goat

**emong** ----- bull

**etelepat/esapat** ----- *boy*

**Ekue** ----- *fox*

**Ekokor** ----- *cock*

(ii) Names of most trees and fruit

e.g. **eloa\*** – mvule tree (\* now generally referred to as **emapule** )

**enimu** ----- *lemon*

**etaget** ----- *banana*

**emucuuga** ----- *an orange*

(iii) Names of insects:

e.g. **esirut** – mosquito

**emukuny** ----- *black ant*

**ekonyelet** ----- *beetle*

**ecwarenit** ----- *bed-bug*

**eidepit** ----- *flea*

(iv) Names of non-indigenous liquids:

e.g. **ecaai** ----- *tea*

**akaawa\*\*** ----- *coffee* (\*\* derived from the Arabic word *qahwa*)

**ebia** ----- *beer*

**ebino\*\*** ----- *wine* (\*\* **ewain** is also accepted )

## **Feminine nouns**

The feminine nouns are:

(i) Names of female beings:

e.g. **akingok** – *bitch*

**akinei** ----- *she-goat*

**apese** ----- *girl*

**Akokor** ----- *hen*

(ii) Names of languages and countries:

e.g. **Ateso** ----- *the Teso language*

**Amusugun** ----- *the English language*

**Alulatin** ----- *the Latin Language*

**Amugana** ----- *The Ganda language (or Ganda women)*

(iii) Names of indigenous liquids:

e.g. **ajon** ----- *local cereal brew*

**akipi** ----- *water*

**akile** ----- *milk*

**acece** ----- *soup*

**akima** ----- *porridge (also **akuma**)*

(iv) Abstract nouns:-

e.g. **ajokus**----- *goodness* (\*also **ajokis**, **ajokisu** are used depending on the area)

**amina** ----- *love*  
**aojau** ----- *height*  
**alalau** ----- *width*  
**ajijim** ----- *tastiness*  
**apianis** ----- *tastelessness*  
**anyunyura** ----- *anger*

(v) Verbs used as nouns:

e.g. **alosit** ----- *going*  
**abunere** ----- *coming*  
**aisiom** ----- *reading*  
**aisom** ----- *jumping*

## Neuter nouns

The neuter nouns are:

(i) Names of neuter or generic objects:  
 e.g. **ituɲanan** ----- person (sex unknown)

**irotin** ----- *roads/ways*

(ii) Names of diminutive objects:  
 e.g. **ikinɲok** ----- *puppy*

**ipese** ----- *baby girl*  
**Imoru** ----- *pebble*  
**imiot** ----- *chick*  
**imukeru** ----- *baby*

## Plural

(i) To form the plural the ending of the noun is changed. This change may consist of the omission of the last syllable, the addition of another syllable or syllables, or the alteration of the last syllable or syllables:

Plural formation	example
omission:	<b>amukat</b> (shoe) - <b>amuk</b> (shoes); <b>atipet</b> (bead) – <b>atipe</b> (beads);
addition:	<b>akan</b> (hand) – <b>akanin</b> (hands); <b>akwap</b> (country)- <b>akwapin</b> (countries)
alteration:	<b>apese</b> (girl) – <b>apesur</b> (girls); <b>ekek</b> (door)- <b>ikekia</b> (doors);

(ii) In the case of masculine nouns the noun prefix also changes as shown in the table on noun prefix above.

(iii) These changes in the endings of nouns are so irregular that it is not worth while trying to formulate rules for the formation of plurals.

(iv) Certain nouns, however, which are derived from verbs, form their plurals according to rules;

(a) Nouns denoting an agent of action (a person who does the action of the verb) form a singular ending in **-an** or **-on** and a plural ending in **-ak** or **-ok**: e.g. **ekamejan** – hunter ; **ikamejak** – hunters; **ekecokon** – herdsman; **ikecokok** – herdsmen;

**ekadukon** -a builder; **ikadukok** -builders; **ekatubon** – judge; **ikatubok** -judges.

(b) Nouns denoting something which does or, is done, form a singular ending in **-et** or **-eta** and a plural ending in **-eta**:

e.g. **elacet** – (*a thing which loosens*) key; **ilaceta** – keys; **arapeta** – cover **arapeta** -covers;

(v) Some nouns have no singular and exist only in the plural:

e.g. **akipi**—water; **ajony** – local brew; **asinge** – sand; **ajo** – sleep; **ileic** – shame

Other nouns have no plural and exist only in the singular;

e.g. **ekuron** – ashes; **akolon**—sun; **adam** – brain; **eduan** – weeds

(vi) Abstract nouns and names of diseases, as in English, have no plural.

e.g. **aiyalama** -happiness; **amin** -love.

(vii) Some nouns form their plural from other roots:

e.g. **aberu** – woman, **ajor** -women; **ikoku** -child, **iduwe** – children.

(viii) Some nouns, in addition to the normal plural, form a generic plural by adding **-sinei** to the plural form:

e.g. **etuṇanan** - man, **ituṇa** - men; **ituṇasinei** - mankind

**akwap** - country, **akwapin** - countries, **akwapisinei** - the world (n dropped for euphony).

## Article

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There is no definite or indefinite article in Teso. *Aberu* means "a woman" or "the woman" according to the context.

## Adverbs

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Adverbs clarify the action of a verb. Interrogative adverbs usually follow the verb they qualify.

e.g. **Elosit nesi ai?** where did he go?

But if the interrogative adverb is strengthened by the particle **BO**, the adverb must precede the verb

e.g. **aibo ejaas itelepai ?** (Where are the boys?) = **ejaas itelepai ai?** , but all the other adverbs follow the verb.

## Adverbs of place

**Ai/aibo**= where?

**nen** =there (not far off)

e.g. **aibo ejai eka'kalaamu?** Where is my pencil?; **Ejai nen** = it's there.



**Ngina** = over there (at a distance)

e.g. **Aibo ejai toto?** Where is mom; **Ejai ngina** = (she's) over there.

**Lailo, laiye** = this way, that way.

e.g. **Kobia lailo, mam ilosi ngina** = come this way, don't go there; **Kobongo laiye, mam ibuni lailo** = Go back there, don't come this way.

**Juwai/Juwayi** = at the back of / that way/that side (usually behind something)

e.g. **Elosit papa juwai** = Dad has gone to the other side / Dad has gone to the rear

**Ajesan** = down there.

e.g. **Aeka je ajesan** = He's gone down there

**Nelwana/ne alwanan** = far off

e.g. **Alot onac ameja nelwana** = (my) brother has gone hunting in a far place

**Eyapye/eyapie/eyapie** = near

e.g. **Eyapie ne elosit ngesi** = he/she has gone nearby (to a near place)

**Toma** = inside

e.g. **Ejai amunyu toma ocupa** = the salt is inside the bottle; **Eroko Yakobo ejai toma agoola ke** = James is still inside his room

**Kiding** = in the middle/between

e.g. **Ejai eyapesi ka kiding na eiduka kede ekanisa** = my office is between the shop and the church; **Ibirokina ekitoi kiding na erot** = the tree has fallen in the middle of the road

**Kau** = behind

**Ngaren (na)** = in front (of)

e.g. **Ngaren na ataker** = In front of the boat

**Osiep** = near/on the side of/beside

e.g. **Ikunyu ber ijo osiep ka** = Please come near me (move closer)

**Diye** = very close

e.g. **Anu inyo ilosia ijo diye do abongun kede akan?** = Why did you go nearby and return empty-handed?

**teten** = (to the) right

e.g. **Ibelokin teten** = turn to the right

**Kediany** = left

e.g. **Ejaasi kesi kediany** = They're on the left (hand side)

**Kide** = East

**Too** = West

**Nyakoi** = North

**Agolitomei / Ongalakimak** = South

## Numerals

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Ateso numerals are from ones place to hundredth place. Numerals upwards from one thousand are borrowed from other languages.

(i) Numbers from one to five are the basis of the whole numerical system in Ateso. Six (6) is literally translated as 5+1 (five and one), 7 as 5+2 (five and two), etc. In the same way 16 is 10+5+1, 17 is 10+5+2, 21 is 20+1, 26 is also 20+5+1, etc.

(ii) Numerals agree in gender with the noun they define:

e.g. **itelepai iuni** three boys, **ikekia iuni** three doors, **imeesan iuni** three tables

**apesur auni** three girls, **aturo auni** three flowers, **iduwe iuni** three children

(iii) Numerals always follow the noun. **ediope** (one) can however, precede, in which case the noun prefix is dropped.

e.g. **edioperot** (or **erot ediope**) one road/way; **adiopeberu** one woman;

**angor auni** three women, **irotin iuni** three roads/ways

<sup>††</sup>The word for zero, **esupur**, is no longer used in the spoken language. Instead **enoot**, a loanword derived from the English naught is generally used.

## Cardinal numbers

Numeral	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
1	Idiope(t)	adiope(t)	yenisodit
2	iyarei	aarei	<i>as in masculine</i>
3	iuni	auni	”
4	ioŋon	aoŋon	”
5	ikany	akany	”
6	ikany-kape	akany-kape	”
7	ikany-kaare	akany-kaare	”
8	ikanykauni	akany-kauni	”
9	Eikanyaaoŋon	akanyaaoŋon	”
10	itomon	atomon	”
11	itomon-kanu-diope	atomon-kanu-diope	”
12	itomon'aare	atomon'aare	”
13	itomon'auni	atomon'auni	”
14	itomon'aoŋon	atomon'aoŋon	”
15	itomon'akany	atomon'aakany	”
16	itomon akany'kape	atomon akany'kape	”
17	itomon akany'kaare	atomon akany'kaare	”
18	itomon akanyauni	atomon akanyauni	”
19	itomon akany aoŋon	atomon akany aoŋon	”
20	akais aare	<i>as in masculine</i>	”
21	akais aarei kanudiope	”	”
30	akais auni	”	”
40	akais aaoŋon	”	”
50	akais akany	”	”
60	akais akany kapei	”	”
100	akwatat (adiope)	”	”
101	akwatat kanu diope	”	”
200	akwat aarei	”	”
500	akwat akany	”	”
1,000	elukumit ediope	”	”
10,000	ilukumin itomon	”	”
1,000,000	emilionit ediope	”	”
100,000,000	imilionin akwatat	”	”

## Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers are formed from cardinal numbers by prefixing the relative forms **lok-** (m), **nak-** (f), **yenik-**(n) as appropriate, to the masculine form of the numeral and by adding **-et** after the numeral.  
e.g. **akany** five, **nakikanyet** fifth (feminine singular)

**iuni** three, **lokiuniet** third (masculine singular)  
**iyarei** two, **yenikiyareit** second (neuter singular)

No.	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
1st	losodit	nasodit	yenisodit
2nd	lokiareit	nakiyareit	yenikiyareit
3rd	louniet	nauniet	yeniuniet
4th	lowononet	nawononet	yeniwononet
5th	loikanyet	naikanyet	yenikanyet
6th	loikanyet ape	naikanyet ape	yenikanyet ape
7th	loikanyetaare	naikanyetaare	yenikanyetaare
8th	loikanyetauni	naukanyetauni	yenikanyetauni
9th	loikanyetaaronet	naikanyetaaronet	yenikanyetaaronet
10th	loitomonet	naitomonet	yenitomonet
11th	loitomonetadiope	naitomonet adiope	yenitomonetadiope
50th	loakaisakany	nakaisakany	yenakaisakany
100th	loakwatat	naakwatat	yenakwatat
last	lo agolon	nagolon	yenagolon

‡ a majority of Iteso (especially those in the Ugandan districts of Soroti, Kumi, Amuria, Bukedea, Serere\_District and Kaberamaido) do not pronounce some ks in speech.

Thus, **nakikanyet** is pronounced **naikanyet**, etc.

## **Loanwords**

Ateso has taken a number of loanwords, primarily from English and Swahili languages.

Words marked with an asterisk (\*) indicates that the last letter in the Ateso word is silent.

English	Ateso	
<u>Car</u>	Emotoka	
<u>Television</u>	Etelevision	
<u>Radio</u>	Eredio	
<u>Fax Machine</u>	Afakis Mashin	
<u>E-mail</u>	E-emeilo *	
<u>Internet</u>	E-intanet	
<u>Computer</u>	Akompiuta	
<u>Telephone++</u>	Esimu *	
<u>Record Player</u>	Arekod puleya	
<u>CD Player</u>	Asidi puleya	
<u>DVD player</u>	Adividi puleya	
<u>disc</u>	Adisiki *	

++The Ateso word for a telephone that most Ateso speakers are familiar with is the word "Esimu" which comes from Luganda.

## References

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## Further reading

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- Loyola, Apuda Ignatius (2007). *English-Ateso Pocket Dictionary* Strategic Outcomes Inc., 274 pp. ISBN 9970-840-03-7.

## External links

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- [PanAfril10n page on Teso & Turkana \(http://www.panafril10n.org/wikidoc/pmwiki.php/PanAfrL10n/TesoTurkana\)](http://www.panafril10n.org/wikidoc/pmwiki.php/PanAfrL10n/TesoTurkana)
  - [Ekitabo Loka Ailip Naka Itunja Kere \(1957\) \(http://mammana.org/bcp/ateso1957/\)](http://mammana.org/bcp/ateso1957/) Ateso Prayer Book digitized by Richard Mammana
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